

The Christian News-Letter

No. 232

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

18th April, 1945

DEAR MEMBER,

I asked a friend, who is very well-informed about international affairs, what in his view are the chief issues which will have to be decided in the international field. "Fundamentally," he replied, "there is only one. What is Russia going to do?" Even if that is not the whole story, it is certainly true that the great enigma of the future is the part which Russia will play in world affairs and the character and direction of her influence. That being so, it is a question of the highest interest to Christians in what degree that influence will be shaped and leavened by Christian ideas and motives.

THE CHURCH IN RUSSIA

In an article in *Christendom*¹ for March Canon Widdrington answers certain criticisms that have been made of the Supplement he wrote for the Christian News-Letter (C.N.-L. No. 216).

First, there is the question whether the Church may not have purchased its new liberties at the price of complete subservience to the State. The new privileges accorded to the Church are striking and far-reaching. Outstanding among them is the re-establishment of the Patriarchate. The number of dioceses, which in the census of 1941 was returned as 30, is now 100. Most important of all for the future is the opening of the first Orthodox theological colleges.

But, granting this external restoration, does the Church possess real freedom? Canon Widdrington holds that, unless we are to charge bishops, priests and lay Christians with grave insincerity we must accept their testimony that they do enjoy freedom to worship and to manage their own affairs, and that the Church, stripped of its revenues and worldly prestige, and relieved of those secular tasks which it had to perform under the old regime, is in a more favourable position than it was before.

He insists again, as he did in the Supplement, that the principal factor in the change was the far-sighted and courageous leadership of the late Metropolitan Sergius, who perceived the deeper meanings of the Russian Revolution and helped to bring about a fundamental

¹ Basil Blackwell, Oxford. Quarterly, 2s.

change in the mind of Churchmen. His insights came gradually to be shared by his fellow-bishops, and during the war have doubtless spread to an increasing number of priests and laity. Leading men in the Russian Church in exile have also from the beginning refused to condemn the Revolution. The late Serge Bulgakoff, Dean of the Russian Academy in Paris, for example, declared: "Communism has arisen on the basis of a search for the truth of life, for the Kingdom of God on earth, with an apocalyptic tenseness of faith in the future, and a sincere desire to realize it, and we may hope that this will for the future is not displeasing to God, and will not be turned to shame." And Berdyaev in a recent lecture in Paris insisted on the affinities between the Christian attitude to life and that of Communism, which began by repudiating Christianity, but could not in fact detach itself from the profoundly religious and humanist ideal of the Russian people.

The second question is whether the leaders of the Church are sufficiently alive to the need for drastic reform in the outlook of the Church, and sufficiently capable of presenting the Christian faith against the background of the stupendous changes in the nation's life. It is here that the death of the Patriarch Sergius is as great a loss to the Church in Russia as that of Archbishop Temple is to the Churches of Great Britain. But there is reason to believe that the Patriarch was able, before he was taken away, to impart something of his vision to others. One of the chief hopes for the future is the radical reform that has taken place in the whole system of training priests. No one will henceforth be accepted for ordination who has not been in the State schools until the age of eighteen. The aim will be to equip the clergy to present Christianity to the contemporary world. The old practice of ordaining men with the scantiest qualifications has been completely abandoned.

The third question is whether the Soviet Government can be trusted to continue its present policy of toleration and friendliness. Canon Widdrington believes that, if Russia is to maintain its influence in the Balkans, the Soviet Government cannot afford bad relations with the Patriarchate, and that it will be reluctant also to embark on a policy that would estrange sympathy in America and Great Britain.

Commander King-Hall has recently returned from a visit to Russia as a member of the British Parliamentary Mission. One of the strongest impressions left on his mind is the marked change in the attitude of the Government to the Churches. In the articles which he has contributed to the *National News-Letter* he describes how, when he wanted to visit the Godless museum in Leningrad, he found that it was closed, and says that this is only one of many indications of a sharp movement "towards religion" by the Party

line. He found that both on religious and on political grounds the Orthodox Church is hostile to the Vatican and anxious to safeguard its interests in the Balkans against Roman Catholic penetration. It seems to him highly probable that Marshal Stalin inclines towards building up a strongly national Russian Church, which will provide a powerful counterweight to Rome.

In January of this year the National Assembly of the Russian Orthodox Church met to elect a new Patriarch and to deal with other Church matters. The meeting was attended by Patriarchs, Archbishops and Bishops from the Middle East and the Balkans, who came at the expense of the Russian Church out of funds provided by the Government. Official greetings and good wishes from the Soviet Government were conveyed to the Assembly by the Chairman of the Council for Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church (a department of Government), who recalled in his speech how "in the days of grave trial which our Motherland experienced many times in the past, the Orthodox Russian Church never severed its connection with the people, lived by its needs, aspirations and hopes, and contributed its share to the nation's cause." The Assembly addressed a message of warm greeting and gratitude to the Soviet Government, declaring that the Church, "thanks be to God, lives a full life in accordance with our canons and Church usage," and received in all its activities full assistance from the Government, and expressing deep appreciation of "the confident and highly favourable and attentive attitude towards all Church enterprises on the part of the State authority."

It would be naïve to suppose that in the attitude of the Soviet Government to the Church there is not a blend of cynicism. It may be doubted whether the policy of the authorities meets with the approval of all members of the Party. But it may well seem to the rulers of Russia, not only that the Church may have a value for propaganda in the West and as an instrument of Russian influence in neighbouring countries, but that religion may provide a needed solace for a harassed people and serve as a focus of national historical sentiment.

The question is how far the Church will be able within this context of varied motives to declare unmistakably and convincingly the Christian view of the ultimate issues of life. It is, of course, not in Russia alone that the Church is exposed to the danger of a too close identification with the national outlook and secular aims. There are those in this country also for whom Church-of-Englandism, rather than Christianity is their real religion.¹ It would be wrong,

¹ As a soldier naïvely confessed in a letter to *The Times*: "To be honest I should admit that I am much more of an Anglican Churchman than I am an orthodox Christian." (Quoted in the brilliant chapter on "English Religion" in D. W. Brogan's *The English People*.)

however, to under-estimate the importance of the fact that the Church in Russia is able to maintain its separate existence as guardian of the Christian tradition. So long as it preserves the Christian scriptures and the heritage of Christian doctrine there sleep within it forces which are never wholly inoperative and may at any time spring into fresh life.

THE MODERN CRUX

In the relations between Christianity and Communism there is one fundamental issue which the Church cannot evade. It is increasingly evident that it is necessary to distinguish in Communism two quite different strains. The Russian experiment exerts a powerful attraction by the intensity of the desire, however secularized, to realize the Kingdom of God on earth, and by its power to evoke from the people as a whole an astonishing energy and self-sacrificing devotion in the service of the common good. But there also prevails among Communists the doctrine that the end justifies every means and that loyalty to the Party admits of no scruples and excuses every crime. This doctrine and practice are by no means confined to Communism, but have acquired among Communists an alarming ascendancy. Miss Alice Cameron protested in a Supplement to the Christian News-Letter (C.N-L. No. 188) against some of the manifestations in this country. The excesses of the Communist element in Greece provoked the strongest resentment and condemnation among our troops.

A few weeks ago (C.N-L. No. 229) we raised as sharply as we could the question whether it is permissible in the service of what we believe to be a righteous cause to go all lengths in ruthlessness.¹ The same problem is the subject of a challenging article by Alexander Miller in *The Presbyterian*, which we welcome in its new, attractive quarterly form. The article deals with questions raised in the two remarkable novels of Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon* and *Arrival and Departure*. Does revolutionary necessity override every human necessity? Are not only our own lives, but the lives of those we most dearly love, to be sacrificed without a qualm, when

¹ In regard to the particular instance that was discussed—the indiscriminate bombing of cities—the question has been raised by a distinguished soldier, Major-General J. F. C. Fuller, in his recently published book *Watchwords* (Skeffington, 12s. 6d.), whether any military advantages of the policy of “strategic” bombing are not bought at too great a cost. What, he asks, will be the future of a continent in which there has been created an almost complete “industrial vacuum”? The task of rebuilding is so colossal that in his view no money system can cope with it. Slave labour in one form or another will become inevitable. “Thus on account of the bomb and the discovery of flight, the whole social, economic, financial and political life of western man will be changed. . . . The very things we are fighting for are being silted up by the rubble and dust of the very means of war which we imagine can liberate the nations and secure for all time our own freedom.”

occasion calls, to Party loyalty? Are we in working for distant ends to treat the human person as of no account and to regard the individual as nothing more than "a unit in a mathematical equation, to be manipulated unemotionally in the work of revolutionary engineering?"

It is essential, as Lex Miller sees, to grasp the fact that these are the questions, not necessarily of bad men, but of men who have a real personal integrity and are prepared to sacrifice themselves freely in a cause in which they believe.

In one of the novels there is a parable of the Last Judgment, in which among those on trial an old man is accused by the prosecutor of complicity in every crime of present, past and future. "He never killed a fly," it is urged in his defence. "The flies he did not kill brought pestilence to a whole province," was the reply. His crime was a compassion that restrained the ruthlessness demanded by the good of the whole.

"If one goes all the way with the logical Communist," Lex Miller concludes, "then a whole abyss of horror opens up." Any kind of ruthlessness is justified if the end is good enough, and the very human purpose of the revolution is swallowed up in a kind of impersonal engineering programme, to which multitudes of ordinary human beings must be sacrificed if need be. If, on the other hand, one turns away in horror from this logic, and begins to indulge in compassion and consideration for individuals and the rest—where is the end? A province may be devastated because a man will not kill a fly. The good of the greater number may be menaced by unwholesome tenderness for ones and twos. Is one not thereby disqualified from taking any effective public action at all?

"Koestler is not stating an abstract dilemma. He is describing the problem of existence as it presents itself to the most sensitive spirits of our time. Those who do not feel the problem have nothing to say and nothing to contribute. Is life to be governed by empirical and experimental standards, or do morality and compassion lay us under absolute obligation and absolute restraint, so that some kinds of action become impossible for us however promising they may look from the efficiency point of view?"

This difficult and crucial problem of our time demands the best theological thought that can be given to it. But the solution will not be found by thought alone, but by concrete obedience in the practical situations with which life confronts us. The answer will come, in Lex Miller's view, not so much by the formulation of general principles as by acting in politics in response to God's direct command. By this is meant that those who sincerely and humbly seek to know how God would have them act will have light

given to them. If we thus seek, "we shall in fact find that the work to which God sets us in His world does not call for the sort of activity which conflicts with His will for us. In other words, we shall have good ground to suspect the political utility of such policies and programmes as offend our Christian 'instinct' when that is tutored by the Gospel."

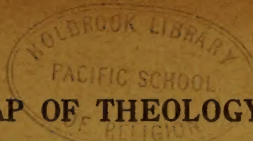
THE SUPPLEMENT

The Rev. Daniel Jenkins is already known to our readers by previous Supplements. The purpose of this Supplement is to give, in accordance with our request, a bird's eye view of the theological situation as it actually is. Only in passing is a reference made to the question how far it is what it ought to be. From the standpoint of the Christian News-Letter this incidental reference is of the highest importance. Mr. Jenkins suggests that one important theological trend of the present time is the recognition of a need for more profound Christian insights into the nature of life in *society*. He questions whether theologians as such have yet produced very much work of the intensity and concentration which the times demand about the political, cultural and economic situation.

The Christian News-Letter has been the object recently of vigorous attacks by Dr. James Parkes whose writings, more particularly in the Penguin series, under the pseudonym of John Hadham, reach a very wide public, on the ground that it refuses to face radically the fundamental problems of our time. These, in his view, are in the main two—how to get men to believe in God, and what shape is to be given in the future to our society. The latter question he identifies with the choice between capitalism and socialism. We must leave these large issues for future consideration, and the charges against the News-Letter can also wait. We do not agree with all that John Hadham writes. But we have no quarrel with his main concern, which we share, that there is an urgent need to bring Christian thought into more direct and living relation to the actual decisions which men individually and socially have to make to-day.

Yours sincerely,

D. H. Deacon



A MAP OF THEOLOGY TO-DAY

By DANIEL JENKINS

The editors have asked me to produce a map of the current theological scene. The first thing the wise person does in reading a map is to find out what its projection is, and thus to understand what parts of it are likely to be distorted. This map's projection is that of a younger orthodox Protestant. That no doubt involves numerous distortions, though not necessarily, as some would say, an unwarranted constriction of the temperate latitudes.

In main outlines the theological situation is very much as it has been for some years. Its chief features are still the revival of Catholicism and the renewal and re-statement of Reformation Protestantism.

The revival of Catholicism, especially in the Church of England, has now been an established fact for several generations, and much of its teaching has had time to work itself out in practice in the ordinary life of congregations. Its more recent developments, the spread of the liturgical movement with its emphasis on the corporate character of the Church's life and the growth of a School of Catholic Sociology, have not the same widespread influence as the older ritualistic and more pietistic Anglo-Catholicism; but they have life in them and are slowly extending. What is clear is that, whatever modifications it may undergo in the future, the Catholic revival has come to stay and any important new theological movement will have to make some terms with it.

The Protestant revival, largely but by no means entirely under the influence of Barth, is still a comparatively new movement in this country and has only begun to show fruits in the life of ordinary churches. But it has undoubtedly transformed the theological situation within Protestantism and, whether it commands agreement or not, has created a new frame of reference for all theological discussion. It has suffered more than any other theological movement in recent history from misunderstanding and misrepresentation, partly through its own fault. It is still widely believed, even apparently by some eminent scholars, that Barth asserts that the Word of God is entirely irrational, that there is no contact between God and man even in faith, and that the natural order is irredeemable, and in consequence what he really says is given scant attention. Nevertheless, his indirect influence in creating a different emphasis in Protestant theology is immense and growing. It seems clear here also that this movement, whatever modifications it may undergo, is likely to have a permanent effect on the future of the Church.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of the theological situation in the war years has been the appearance of many signs of growing understanding between some of the representatives of both these movements. We must be careful not to exaggerate nor to impart an element of inhibiting self-consciousness to discussions which for a long time must remain informal and preparatory. No one can claim that there are not still great gulfs fixed between Catholics and Protestants, nor that the outlines of a great oecumenical theology which will incorporate the best insights of both the Catholic and Protestant revivals have yet appeared, as they must before a creative reunion can take place. But there are enough indications to justify both sides in carrying on conversations in a spirit of greater hopefulness and confidence than ever before. The influence of Barth upon some Anglo-Catholics has been considerable for some years. The point of view expressed in *Blackfriars*, the journal of the Oxford Dominicans, is more congenial to Reformed Protestants than that of any Roman Catholic group for a long time. Niebuhr is read widely and with much appreciation in Catholic circles. The recent writings of Christopher Dawson show a very positive attitude towards the place of the Free Churches in the history of England. The deep interest of Reformed theologians in the doctrine of the Church has evoked sympathetic responses from the Catholic side. The liturgical movement in Catholicism has several points of affinity with Congregational teaching about the Church meeting. Above all, the revival of constructive biblical theology has affected both groups alike. What all this adds up to remains to be seen, but obviously it is something new and something important for the future of the oecumenical movement. And it certainly needs to be borne in mind when it is said, as it often is in these days, that, because of mutual irritation over matters like the South India Scheme, the outlook for reunion has become very dark.

These two revivals and their relation to one another compose, in my view, the main features of the theological scene. But there are two others which are also very important. The first is the revival of confessionalism, of interest in and re-affirmation of the distinctive witness of one's own church tradition. This has been very marked of recent years. Baptists and Methodists have always been very conscious of their distinctive beliefs and traditions, but it is a relatively new thing in modern times for Presbyterians and Congregationalists to turn away from their preoccupation with biblical and dogmatic studies to the intensive analysis of their own Reformation fathers. And the pages of *Theology* have recently been enlivened by a discussion of the precise nature of distinctively Anglican theology. This revival of confessionalism is due partly to the revival of Reformed theology, which has stimulated interest

in the Reformers of the various Churches and their conceptions of Church order, but it is also partly due to the work of the oecumenical movement itself, which by bringing Churches together has stimulated each of them to consider its own position more critically and self-consciously. So far this revival of confessionalism has proved itself to be a healthy and stimulating influence. Churches will not be ready to re-unite until all of them become more true to their own best principles. The bogey of a vague "undenominationalism," which it is still fashionable to invoke in some quarters against any gesture in the direction of co-operation between Churches, is much less real than it was only a few years ago.

The other important theological trend of the present time is the recognition of a need for more profound Christian insights into the nature of life in society. Here again it is significant that there is a growing consensus of opinion among thinking Christians about the character of the crisis through which the world is passing and of Christian action within it. Archbishop Temple's Supplement on "Christians in the Secular Order" is a striking illustration of this. And the divergences which still exist bear very little relation to traditional ecclesiastical alignments. But while the recognition of the need for clearer Christian teaching about life in secular society is now widespread it cannot be said that theologians as such have yet produced very much work of the intensity and concentration which the times demand about the political, cultural and economic situation. The influence of Niebuhr is still limited, but it is growing. The *Christendom* group of Anglo-Catholic sociologists have been producing work of considerable interest for several years now. Above all, readers of the Christian News-Letter need no reminder of the work of the Christian Frontier Council. Christian thought in general cannot yet be said to have measured up to the demands made upon it by the secularized society of to-day, but we can say that in some fields at any rate the theological world is astir about these matters and that there is hope for the future.

The revival of confessionalism and the awakening of a theological concern for the life of society flourish to a large extent within the context of the oecumenical movement and, broadly speaking, tend to strengthen that movement. But there are other factors in the situation which have very little relation to the movement and tend to work in a different direction.

Speaking very much from the outside I have the impression that theologically-minded but fundamentalist or near-fundamentalist evangelicalism has consolidated and further articulated its position recently. The exponents of this view-point appear to have no interest in the contemporary cultural crisis and, for people who purport to be biblical theologians, are astonishingly indifferent to

the doctrine of the Church. They are disposed, therefore, to have little or nothing to do with the oecumenical movement. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that there is considerable vitality and power in this movement which is imparting a great deal of stiffening to emotional evangelicalism. It has great influence among the evangelical unions in universities and among a small but closely-knit minority of members of the medical profession.

At the other end of the scale, a definite hardening in the position of certain Anglo-Catholics is clearly visible. The agitation over the South India scheme for re-union in that part of the world and the controversy over Church schools and their place under the new Education Act have made some of them very suspicious of the oecumenical movement, despite the long association of many Anglo-Catholic leaders with it. One or two of their more ebullient representatives even speak of it as an organ of Pan-Protestant hegemony, while others see in it the seeds of a new religion of "British Christianity." "The Faith in England," a signpost book by Canon A. H. Rees, with, to say the least of it, its highly original interpretation of English Church history, typifies this position. In view of the fact that several diverging tendencies still exist in uneasy association within the Anglo-Catholic party, it is difficult to forecast what the future influence of this group is likely to be. Their deep devotional spirit and their passionate desire to recover part of the lost heritage of the Christian past are a lesson to us all; but it is hard to believe that the more clericalist and formalist elements in the group, with their preoccupation with questions of order and jurisdiction at the expense of prophetic testimony to the real needs of men in our time, and their aggressive, unself-critical sectarianism, can exercise much influence on the future of the Church.

A third factor in the present theological situation, which also weakens the oecumenical movement, is the divorce between our modern "spiritualizers" and both the Catholic and the Protestant revivals. By the "spiritualizers" I mean those who exalt the Spirit over the Word and over tradition, and who, possessed by a passion for Christian perfection, go out and separate themselves from the world in little groups of their own. They have exercised a strong influence on many aspects of English religion ever since the time of the sectaries of the seventeenth century, to go back no farther, and their point of view finds powerful expression in the writings of Middleton Murry and in the activities of the very widespread community movement. Their pacifism and their distrust of institutions and their impatience with all who have compromised themselves with our present industrialized society cause estrangement between them and the rest of the Church. But in my view it is worth while making the effort to bridge the gulf. They need to listen to the rest of the

Church if they are not to fall into their besetting sins of pride and irresponsibility, and the rest of the Church needs to listen to them if it is not to succumb to formalism and compromise with the world.

What signs are there of changes in the landscape in the future ? There are no signs yet of the emergence of a distinctively war-time theology. Those who were the "younger theologians" in 1939 are still the "younger theologians." In the circumstances that is perhaps inevitable, especially as the theological work being done in the years immediately before 1939 was a theology which was already virtually addressing itself to a war-situation ; but it is obviously a fact of great peril as well as of opportunity. The "younger theologians" must beware lest the gap between themselves and their successors will become so great over the intervening years as to be unbridgeable and many important insights be lost to both sides. That has already happened to an alarming extent between two generations of theologians in the Church, and for it to happen very soon again would cause intolerable confusion and division.

What signs, however, already exist of developments which may possibly take place ? One thing I think we can assert with some confidence. We are going to witness a revaluation of Liberalism. We are on the brink of what used to be called in student circles which loved the game of labelling theological tendencies, the post-anti-Liberal period. If it is permitted for a convinced anti-Liberal, in the theological sense anyway, to say so, one of the greatest sources of weakness in the present theological situation has been the poor fight put up by Liberalism against the onslaughts which have been made upon it in the last twenty years. It is hard to believe that it has not more to be said for it than most of its protagonists have so far troubled to say. For the most part, they have contented themselves either with sulking in their tents and emerging only to pour an outburst of abuse against their opponents, or else with repeating again the watchwords of the battles of the last generation and wondering why they evoke no response.

Liberalism in the theological sphere has made no attempt to restate itself against the background of a serious appraisal of the criticisms passed upon it by the Catholic and Protestant revivals in any way comparable, for example, with the attempt to restate Liberalism in the political and economic sphere by Hayek in his *Road to Serfdom*. The result is that some of the valuable and important things which Liberalism has stood for in modern theology, in however wrongheaded a way as some may believe, are in danger of being lost. But from within both Protestantism and Catholicism there are signs of increasing efforts to restate the more positive elements in Liberalism within the context of a doctrine of God, man

and the Church, which takes the transcendent reign of God and the reality of sin much more seriously than Liberalism itself did. These efforts are being made by some of those who led the attack on Liberalism in the first place. Niebuhr in his Gifford Lectures has produced our best modern defence of toleration. Barth's passionate concern for the human values and the liberal virtues, always a strong element in his teaching despite popular notions to the contrary, and the excesses of some "Barthians," has come more to the forefront recently. In our English situation, the work of Donald Mackinnon and Professor H. A. Hodges reflects a strong anxiety that the Church should defend freedom of thought in the university and democracy in society, and should honestly listen to what modern humanists have to say for themselves. The growth of this kind of activity should do much to give warmth and humanity to traditional Catholic teaching and to deliver Protestantism from romantic pessimism about human nature and to make both take more seriously the great problem of communicating biblical faith to men conditioned by the forms of thought of secularized modern society.

In general, it can be said that the theological situation still bears the marks of the revival and promise which it displayed before the war broke out. But few significant developments have taken place since the war started, and theologians as a class appear to show a weariness and preoccupation for which, on the whole, they have less reason than most other groups in the community. Theologians must work harder, more purposefully and in closer co-operation if they are to serve the proclamation of God's truth in this time. In particular, they must devote more attention to the systematic study of the issues which divide the Churches at home, to the problem of "communication" we mentioned earlier and, above all, to standing alongside their fellow-Christians in the world as they try to see their way through the tangled mass of the secular order, that they may the better help them see where to look for guidance and for strength.

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